

New Del. 1 toll starts Wednesday

By **D.L. Bonar**

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ST. GEORGES — Delaware toll takers were handing out paper rather than taking it in Monday as they prepare to open the new toll plaza for business at Biddles Corner.

The "free ride" on the newest section of Del. 1 between Odessa and the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal ends Wednesday.

For the past month, the Delaware Department of Transportation has allowed free southbound use of the new section of highway while finishing touches were put on the toll plaza south of the canal and links to U.S. 13. The northbound lanes were opened a week ago.

The nine-mile section of highway is the next-to-last leg in the largest highway construction project in recent state history. The final section of Del. 1 is expected to be complete by 2003 or early 2004.

Opening ceremonies for the new toll plaza take place at 11

a.m., with officials from DelDOT and Gov. Thomas R. Carper's office taking part. At 3 p.m., according to DelDOT spokesman Michael Williams, motorists may expect a slight delay while the first paying customers are ushered through the toll plaza.

Mr. Williams said motorists should take their time and slow down to avoid confusion in the first couple of days the plaza is in operation.

"We expect a period of adjustment for motorists who regularly travel up and down the state," Mr. Williams said Monday.

"We have been handing out flyers reminding our regular customers of the changes that are about to take place, and we hope there will be as little inconvenience as possible with the changeover."

The new sections of highway and the toll collection booths feature a high-speed collection system, linked with E-ZPass, the electronically collected toll system now in effect.

Cash customers are being

warned not to use the E-ZPass lane for their travels. Doing so will cause them to pay a \$25 fine after the plaza is opened tomorrow.

Customers who use the roadway on a regular basis are urged to take advantage of the E-ZPass system. Rather than the \$1 toll on the new section, E-ZPass customers will pay 85 cents. Mr. Williams pointed out discounts also will be made available for multi-axle vehicles registered with E-ZPass.

The system is extremely accurate, the DelDOT spokesman said.

"A line of traffic traveling 100 mph six inches apart would be accurately identified," Mr. Williams said.

To register for E-ZPass, visit any DelDOT toll plaza, call 1-888-AUTO-TOLL or log on to www.ezpass.com.

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